team

better block
BETTER BLOCKS AROUND THE WORLD

UNITED STATES: 86
CANADA: 2
AUSTRALIA: 3

DALLAS, TX  APRIL 2019
BETHLEHEM, VT  OCTOBER 2019
BIRMINGHAM, AL  OCTOBER 2019
Community Walk & Talk

A community-led walk of the Bethel Downtown took place in June of 2016, and was followed by a resident conversation discussing opportunities for pop-up businesses, street modifications, new public spaces and many other small interventions aimed at improving livability.

Residents filled in maps and surveys with ideas that were culled by the Vermont Better Block team into a series of concepts that had the greatest potential for implementation.
02.

Concept Map

Working with key property owners, advocates, designers and residents the Team conceptualized ideas for landscaping, storefront facade improvements, and programing to the area. The concept plan below highlights areas for temporary interventions using materials that can be borrowed, built and bought for a weekend intervention to reveal the true potential of downtown Bethel.
Community Build
Community Build
The largest intervention to the street was the addition of over 700 feet of a dedicated lane for people using alternative transportation. Bethell’s blue lane was the first test of a multi-purpose lane like this in the United States.
Blue Lane

While no horses used the blue lane during the weekend test, many bicyclists, walkers, scooter riders, and dog walkers approved. Many adults and children alike mentioned that this was the first time they had safely biked downtown.

BLUE LANE

Open to:

BIKES  WHEELCHAIRS
STROLLERS  SEGWAYS
HORSES  DOG WALKERS
DANCERS  SKATEBOARDERS
ROLLERBLADERS  CARTWHEELERS
FLYING CARPETS  SCOOTERS

Please be considerate and share the lane. Keep right and pass on the left.
(Before Better Block) AVERAGE 80 dB

(During Better Block) AVERAGE 40 dB

SCALE
110 dB | Rock Concert
100 dB | Blow Dryer
90 dB | Semi Truck at Highway speed
80 dB | Alarm Clock
70 dB | Busy Traffic
60 dB | Conversation at a Cafe
50 dB | Rainfalling
40 dB | Quiet Library
30 dB | Whisper
20 dB | Ticking Watch
10 dB | Breathing
03. Parklet

Parklets calm traffic by narrowing the street, like a bulb-out, and give another visual cue to drivers that this place is different and worth a stop.
4 POP-UP SHOPS

- KIDS ART
- FEED YOUR MIND
- LOOM INATIONS
- MADE IN BETHEL
- OLD SIGNS REMOVED
- WINDOW DISPLAY
- DOORS OPEN
- LIGHTS ON
- NEW SIGNS
Appendix | Surveys

Bethel hosted Vermont’s first Better Block project from Sept. 30-Oct. 2, 2016. We experimented with pop-up shops, a temporary bike lane and street improvements, public art, pop-up beer garden and live music venue, hikes and activities, taco stand and more. It was an effort to test out changes that could become permanent in an effort to make Bethel more vibrant, accessible and creative. Here’s what we found.

Direct Outcomes

**$4,881**
Dollars earned by pop-up businesses during Better Block

**12**
Number of temporary businesses running during Better Block

**27**
Average traffic speed before Better Block

**15**
Average traffic speed with experimental traffic calming

Alarm clock
Average decibel level (80) of traffic before Better Block

Quiet library
Average decibel level (60) of traffic with experimental traffic calming

Top Changes
At Better Block, we asked people to vote for their favorite change or intervention. These were the winners.

Survey Results
We asked community members to fill out an online survey in the weeks after Better Block, telling us how they participated and what they liked or didn’t like.

How did you hear about Better Block?

At Better Block, I...

Got excited about seeing what the town could be :) - attendee

- Air delicious food
- Bought something in a pop-up shop
- Bought something from an established business
- Played a game
- Spent time with family or friends
- Ran into someone I know
- Met someone new
- Went for a hike or walk
- Rode a bike
- Listened to music
- Made art
- Rode a Segway
- Thought about what made Bethel better
- Experienced something new in Bethel
- Had fun
- Spent more than 1 hour downtown

- Yes

I think Better Block had the following impact on downtown Bethel (during the event itself...)

- Much Better
- No Opinion / Mixed Impacts
- Somewhat Better
- Somewhat Worse

I would like to see more of these (or permanent) improvements.

- Pop-up shops
- New food establishments
- Live music venue
- Bike/pedestrian area
- Crosswalk/pedestrian improvements
- Beer garden & outdoor seating
- Downtown transit stop
- Activities (hikes, demos, bike events)
- Public art

Parking was somewhat of a challenge, but worth it. - attendee

Town was much more difficult to drive through [with] bike lanes and center islands. - attendee
The book box was genius! - attendee

The new businesses I would most like to see are...

- Grocery
- Face stand
- Farmers market downtown
- Art and craft shop
- Beer garden
- Bed and breakfast
- Senior home
- Pop-up grocery market
- Party store

Stores were not wheelchair accessible. - attendee

If I could make one permanent change to downtown Bethel, it would be...

More food establishments
More businesses
More gathering places
Fill beauty buildings
More pedestrian options

I would love to see more growth while keeping things local, supporting artisans and small businesses. - attendee

I would love to see more growth while keeping things local, supporting artisans and small businesses.

Survey Respondents
Here are the details about the people who responded to our survey.

Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Time in Bc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I participated in Better Block by...

- Helping to organize
- Running a pop-up shop or gallery
- Volunteering during the block
- Working on site
- Counting supplies or materials

I would like to stay involved in the following ways...

- Join organizing group: 19%
- Volunteer on projects: 48%
- Be informed of future events: 57%
- Not sure: 21%
- Actually, not so much: 16%
This map shows the disinvestment within downtown Bethel before the Better Block project began.

Today, the overwhelming number of changes to the built environment, dollars invested, and spaces imported and hours of volunteer time made since Better Block came to Bethel stand as a hallmark Better Block project that continues to surpass its initial investment.
Volunteers created a pop up sweet shop, vinyl music store, and arts and craft center in the Blossom Block Building. Over the three day event, the stores saw many patrons and sales generated from the once dormant, vacant spaces.

The Arnold Block building was sold in December 2017 and is now home to a community-driven multi-part business: Bethel Works, Bethel Moves, Bethel Meets, and Bethel Cooks @ the Arnold Block. The new owners started this venture to support local entrepreneurs and professionals, to meet community needs by acting as a business incubator and a resource for finance workers, and by offering accommodations for community gatherings. So far, the Arnold Block is furnishing office space to seven area finance professionals and graduate students. It has also hosted several Bethel University classes and a town committee meeting that otherwise would not have been possible (due to the poor Internet service in our area). It will soon host a gathering of regional and statewide stakeholders interested in the technical aspects of the traffic-calming pilot program. This event will be made possible by AARP Vermont, our Better Block sponsors.
Thanks for a great year of BU classes at the Arnold Block!
First day of coworking = success!
Today, the Depot, but has been sold and opened in June 2016 as Baby’s Bar. The space from Chicago, who purchased the building, directly used some better block into their downtown plan as evidence of energy in downtown Bethel, and also used input from Better Block to help shape some of their business offerings.

In spring of 2017 BRI won a $70,000 Animating Infrastructure grant from the Vermont Arts Council to make positive three public art projects in downtown Bethel. A Trout Mural—designed by artist Mary Lacy and executed by the artist and the Bethel community—was placed on the retaining wall at the intersection of routes 12 and 10. This inspiring piece of art is seen by hundreds of daily passersby, and covers an ugly, cracked retaining wall.
Rubber Feet

Working with Team Better Block and AARP Vermont, the Town installed brand-new traffic-calming pedestrian bulbouts similar to those tested during the Better Block. The bulbouts are installed at two crosswalks in downtown Bethel. Pedestrian counters were also installed to provide metrics of the crosswalks usage. The bulbouts are removable, and will be removed and stored before the first snowfall this coming winter. They will be reinstalled the following spring.

In 2017 Bethel Revitalization Initiative (BRI) won the Project of the Year Award for Bethel Better Block from the Vermont Planners' Association. It was accepted in a ceremony at the Vermont State House by BRI volunteers.
placemaking 101

“What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people.”
—William H. Whyte

PLACEMAKING TRIANGULATION
Give it a name.

FRUIT BELT
BETTER BLOCK, BETTER LIFE

PITTSFIELD
BETTER BLOCK

ash crescent
better block

COLUMBIA AVENUE
BETTER BLOCK
Set a date.
THE PROCESS ONLY TAKES 90 DAYS BUT IT LEAVES A BIG IMPACT.

Meet Jane
Jane lives in the neighborhood of the Better Block and learns about the project coming to her neighborhood at the local coffee shop, and decides to attend the Walk & Talk.

90 days out

Walk & Talk
Jane and a couple of neighbors at the Walk & Talk get to know each other over a drink after the meeting.

60 days out

Concept Plan
At the concept plan workshop, Jane sees her and her neighbor's ideas conceptualized into a map with a plan for how to turn this concept into a reality in the next 40 days.

40 days out

Build Week
Jane attends a couple of build week workshops. She helps clean out a vacant storefront that will be used as a pop-up flower shop, helps build street furniture that will be used, and paints over some graffiti that is on the block.

4 days out

Better Block Event
Jane gets to see how her hard work has paid off. She sees someone using the bench she built, buys flowers at the pop-up shop she helped activate, and she sees people getting excited about the future of her neighborhood.

Event Day

Post-Better Block
Jane does not want the momentum of the Better Block to stop. She continues to plan monthly neighborhood clean up days, plans "Neighbors Night Out" events, and runs for City Council.

Jane feels empowered to make change. She is an advocate for the neighborhood and continues to find ways to improve it.
Make it public.